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# BELGIUM

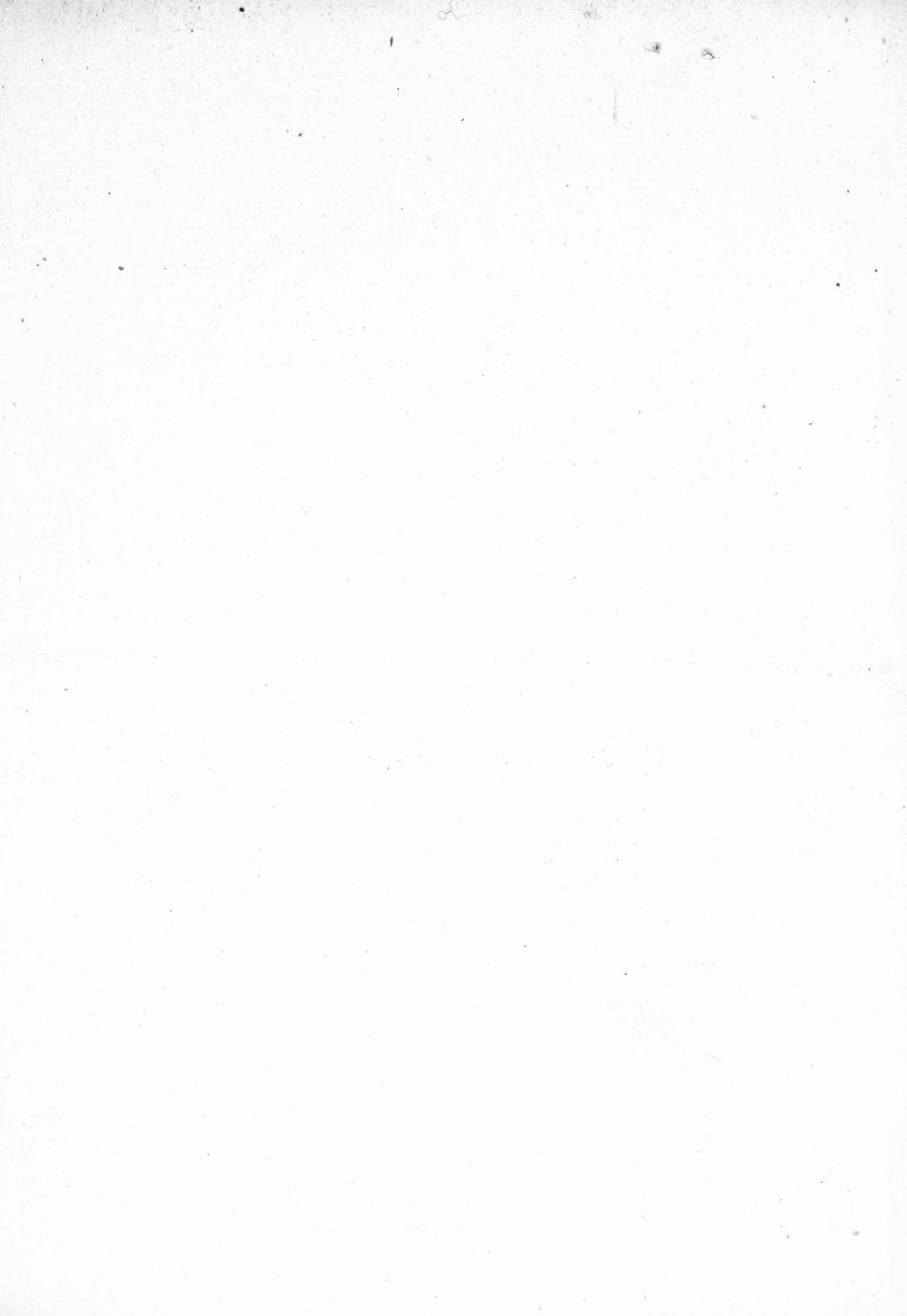
REMARKS OF EDGAR A. BANCROFT  
AT THE CHICAGO DINNER

TO

THE BELGIAN COMMISSION

JULY 2, 1917

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## BELGIUM

No one can do full justice to Belgium's part in this war. It is a strange fact that a little nation,—peaceful and industrious, its neutrality guaranteed by the principal powers of Europe, having no share in their ambitions and giving offense to none,—should suddenly become the vital center of the great conflict. And Belgium will be the center of that conflict until peace comes.

When the story of this awful war is written, its brightest and its saddest pages will tell of Belgium.

It was Germany's breach of plighted faith to Belgium, her ruthless invasion of Belgium, and her barbarous mistreatment and murder of innocent and unresisting Belgium citizens—scholars, priests, women and children—that shocked the conscience of mankind and condemned the German arms to everlasting infamy.

It was Belgium's prompt and complete sacrifice to her duty as a neutral and her brave stand against overwhelming force that aroused England and gave France her opportunity for successful defense.

But for the knightly King Albert and his valorous army, Calais would have fallen, the German officers would have taken up their appointed quarters in the residences of Paris, and there would have been no glorious victory at the Marne.

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Where in the records of human injustice, cruelty and shame are there crimes so pitiless and heartrending, so utterly base and fiendish, as the German outrages upon the people of Belgium? To them were added the looting and burning of her cities, the destruction of her industries, the impoverishment of her citizens, and then, down to this very hour, the deportation into slavery of her unhappy sons.

And yet how the dark pages of this record are brightened by the unbroken courage and dauntless spirit of the Belgians—their steadfast loyalty through suffering unto death!

And the bravest is the great-souled Cardinal Mercier, hero-shepherd of the wolf-torn flock. How the heart of the world will treasure the name of Mercier—Mercier, whose words and service shine like a star through the blackness of Belgium's terrible night!

The scattered survivors of Belgium, with their property gone and their homes desolate, but with their honor radiant and their patriotism glorified by such sacrifice as no nation has made, are a surer basis for a noble and enduring state than the myriad legions in the panoply of war which treacherously wrought this ruin.

It was the atrocities in Belgium that lit the first war-fire in the heart of America. It was the spectacle of Belgium in the hands of her despoilers that made neutrality a hateful word. It was the proud, brave soul of Belgium, that did not flinch or falter in the presence of supreme agonies, that first challenged our nation's sense of justice and humanity.

Then, with the cries of her little children in our ears, with the sight before our eyes of her women put to shameful death and of all the hideousness of a ravaged country, we Americans began to ask ourselves: What does honor mean, or justice, or humanity, if we, the strong, raise not our hand against horror like this wrought upon the weak?

What are the principles of human freedom and justice which America has always professed—where is the moral integrity of our nation, where the conscience of civilized men—if we strike no blow in their behalf?

There is one word that answers every question, every objection, every doubt that may be raised as to our part in this war. That word is Belgium.

Belgium is the unanswerable proof of Germany's responsibility for this devastating war.

Belgium compels the final triumph of justice and freedom.

Belgium makes certain the overthrow of oppression and force and the end of Prussia's ruthless power.

Belgium prevents any peace without restitution and reparation. For, as surely as men love justice and a just God rules the universe, Belgium shall be vindicated and requited, and shall rise again in honor, strength and beauty.

No reparation can be made for the shameful and tortured deaths of her sons and daughters.

“Their country conquers with their martyrdom,  
And freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.”

But we Americans are pledged to see that she shall have all possible reparation—to the last stone of her ruined buildings, to the last dollar of her looted treasures.

There are some who talk of peace. But how vain and unworthy is such talk while the Prussian fist grips the throat of prostrate Belgium!

We shall have peace—but it will be the peace of the flaming sword of justice. And the measure of the justice and the righteousness of that peace will be the justice it does to unhappy Belgium.

We shall have peace when we win it from the brutal forces of autocracy. Those lean, square-jawed fighting men of our own America, who are, at this hour, near the firing-line "somewhere in France"—they and the legions to follow them from these shores—will help to bring back a just and lasting peace to us, to bleeding Belgium, and to the world.

Now and then there comes to us an intimate touch of the misery that has been Belgium's daily portion for nearly three years. Recently I met a priest, lately come from many years' ministrations to that stricken people. One picture out of what he told me I shall give you, for the sheer pathos of it: "Yes, Belgium suffers," said Father Maguire, "but she is brave beyond belief, and she is very grateful to America. When the little children lisp the Lord's Prayer and come to, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' they add, 'and bless the Americans.'"

If we are ever inclined to think we have been generous to Belgium, let us remember her sacrifices—and her little children.

When this war is done and those who fought it are gone, when all the vast and terrible things of today are history, written by the hands of men still to be born, the pages of that history which will shine through the ages with the whitest and holiest light will be those that tell the story of Belgium—the littlest of nations become, by her sacrifices and her heroism, the most illustrious. Long, long from now, when the Marne, Ypres, the Somme, and even Verdun are only dates and names, men will read the story of Belgium's crucifixion, and read it with love and with tears.

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